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## **EARTHQUAKES: Texas commissioner to host town hall on North Texas shaking**

Mike Soraghan, E&E reporter

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One of the three elected commissioners overseeing oil and gas in Texas has scheduled a town hall meeting about concerns that drilling activities in North Texas might be causing earthquakes.

Texas Railroad Commissioner David Porter announced Friday that he will host the meeting Jan. 2 in Azle, Texas, northwest of Fort Worth, where the small but persistent earthquakes are centered.

"He will listen to resident's concerns and outline what he plans to do as Texas Railroad Commissioner," according to an announcement from his office. It added that "Other state and local officials will be in attendance."

Azle's mayor, Alan Brundrett, has asked the Railroad Commission to investigate whether the earthquakes that have rattled the area since early November are linked to deep injection wells near the city used for disposal of oil and gas waste fluid ([EnergyWire](#), Dec. 5). So have officials in Parker County, where half of Azle is located.

The commission's effort is off to a slow start. Commission spokespersons have said inspectors looked at one of the three active injection wells in the area. It was found to be in compliance with the rules, but those rules don't address earthquakes.

Also, the commission's website says "staff has not identified a significant correlation between faulting and injection practices," which contradicts established science on injection ([EnergyWire](#), Dec. 18).

Commission spokeswoman Ramona Nye said earlier this week that the statement should be clarified to say the staff hasn't identified a "definitive" correlation between earthquakes and "injection in Texas." But the original statement remains on the [commission website](#).

Brundrett said Porter called him to set up the meeting but didn't provide much more information about it. He said the listening session doesn't satisfy all of his concerns.

"I still want an investigation into the cause of the earthquakes," he said Friday.

Geologists have known for decades that deep injection of many types of industrial waste can lubricate faults and unleash earthquakes. Researchers have linked quakes to injection wells in Arkansas, Colorado, Ohio, Oklahoma and Texas.

In October, the U.S. Geological Survey warned that central Oklahoma is in the midst of an earthquake "swarm," potentially linked to injection.

Texas has some of the best-documented seismic activity around injection wells. Three injection wells in the Dallas area were voluntarily shut down by the operator after earthquakes nearby. Researchers have linked injection to earthquakes in the Barnett Shale in North Texas and the Haynesville Shale in East Texas.

Porter, a certified public accountant from Midland, was elected to a six-year term in 2010. In 2011, he created the Eagle Ford Shale Task Force to delve into issues involving flaring, gas pipeline infrastructure and road conditions in South Texas where shale drilling has led to a new boom in oil production.

But as his announcement noted, he is only one of three commissioners, and he would need additional support to make any sort of procedural or policy changes at the state's oil and gas agency.

Damaging earthquakes have not been linked directly to the fracturing process. But drilling for oil and gas in shale, using hydraulic fracturing, creates millions of gallons of salty, toxic wastewater that is usually injected underground into deep wells.

Around Azle, the earthquakes started with a magnitude-2.6 quake Nov. 6. They then rose in strength to magnitude 3.6 on Nov. 20. They've been smaller since, except for another magnitude-3.6 quake Dec. 8.

Seismologists at Southern Methodist University in Dallas have installed four seismic recorders from USGS in the area to obtain more precise locations.